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March 25, 2004

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Regents Set To Approve First Step Toward Optical Network Connectivity

The Louisiana Board of Regents Technology Committee approved the first phase of a plan that would bring optical network connectivity to Louisiana's research universities. Full Board approval, expected at today's meeting, would commit the \$5 million necessary for Louisiana to become part of the National Lambda Rail (NLR), a nationwide optical fiber infrastructure that will make it possible for scientists at universities and corporations across the country to work collaboratively on computer-based research projects. As NLR is currently configured, the closest NLR connection node would be in Dallas. But Louisiana's commitment to NLR, in concert with a similar commitment by Texas, will help make it possible to bring a loop of the NLR through Houston to Baton Rouge and, ultimately, to Jacksonville, Florida, where the next-closest node of the currently-configured Lambda Rail would be.

The research capacity that will ultimately be realized through the NLR and optical network connectivity would put Louisiana universities in a position to access over one billion dollars in federal research grants from such sources as the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education and NASA.

"I don't think I can overstate the importance of Louisiana's developing the ability to access the Lambda Rail," said Commissioner of Higher Education Joseph Savoie. "It's where technology and university research are going. The implications of this investment for our ability to participate in cutting-edge research that can significantly impact economic development are far reaching."

Dr. Jerry Draayer of the Southeastern Universities Research Association (SURA), briefed the Technology Committee on the broader implications of Lambda Rail access for Louisiana and the Southeast. SURA, a cooperative of 62 universities in the Southeast that promotes collaboration in science and technology, is working closely with Texas and Louisiana to make sure that the Lambda Rail goes through South Texas, on through Louisiana, ultimately establishing a closed loop across the Southeast to Jacksonville. SURA has struck a deal with AT&T that would allow Texas, Louisiana and other states to use AT&T's "dark fiber" (previously-installed optical fiber not yet in use) already in the ground through much of the region in question, for little or no cost.

(more)

Optical Network

ADD ONE

“You know how important I-10 is to commerce in the Southeast. We’re taking about creating the I-10 of the information highway,” said Draayer. “It would close the ‘open jaw’ of the Lambda Rail between Dallas and Jacksonville, and it would ensure that Louisiana is a player in the system, with representation on the NLR board, which means influence on NLR policy. It’s a tremendous opportunity for Louisiana and the entire region.”

Once a Lambda Rail access node is established in Baton Rouge, Phase II of the Louisiana Optical Network Initiative (LONI) would connect Louisiana’s research universities with the Lambda Rail. Among the Louisiana research institutions that expect to take advantage of Lambda Rail access and LONI are LSU, Louisiana Tech, Southern University, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Tulane, and the University of New Orleans. Experts estimate that LONI would allow computer research networking among universities at a speed 1000 times faster than current capacity.

The cost of Phase I will be paid from funds available through the Louisiana Educational Quality Trust Fund (LEQTF), sometimes referred to as the “8(g) fund,” created from a 1986 settlement Louisiana received as the result of a dispute over offshore oil revenues. The interest proceeds of the LEQTF are dedicated to improving educational quality at all levels in Louisiana.